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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: KARBALA VIEWS ON OBAMA ELECTION

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: With the assistance of one of our Locally Employed Staff (LES), PRT Karbala conducted an informal survey of Karbala residents to get a sense of local views concerning the election of Barack Obama as the next President of the United States. Although not a scientific sampling, the opinions expressed aptly illustrate the range of public sentiment here. End Summary.

Meet the New Boss

¶2. (SBU) On November 8, a well-connected LES member of the PRT surveyed a variety of contacts in Karbala to get a sense of local views concerning the election of Barack Obama as the next President of the United States. Opinions expressed in this non-scientific survey ranged from cynicism and fear to inspiration and hope. Following are comments from the persons surveyed:

-- A high-school history teacher: "There will not be that big a difference between this administration and the coming one. Yes, there will be new names and new faces, but nothing more than that."

-- The owner of a real-estate agency: "I'm very optimistic about Obama, as I have heard and read in the news that his grandfathers were Muslims from Kenya and his relatives and family are still there. At least we know Obama is not a war maniac like Bush."

-- A former Sadrist: "Obama will have no power over the political situation in America, he is just an official employee. The Jewish lobby controls everything in America."

-- A police official: "I think American policy toward Iraq will not change. It is not something related to the Democrats or to the Republicans, but rather to U.S. national security. All the Americans believe they have to keep enough troops in Iraq and in Afghanistan to protect the Americans and to surround al-Qa'ida members in those two countries so as to prevent them from entering the United States. This is the whole story and I believe that Obama will not take the chance to withdraw U.S. troops within 16 months as he announced in his presidential campaign. He will keep the troops here for at least a couple of years."

-- A civil engineer: "Obama will make a big change. He knows Americans lost patience with the Bush Administration and he does not want to keep U.S. forces in Iraq forever, so -- in order to demonstrate his credibility -- he must implement his promise to withdraw from Iraq very soon."

-- A barber: "Obama will not be good for us as Shias. His grandfathers are Sunni Muslims and so is his tribe in Kenya, so I think the Iraqi Sunnis will benefit from his election."

-- An Arabic literature scholar: "I think that our political

blocs and our politicians need to learn and take lessons from Barack Obama. This victory is a victory for minorities all over the world, especially in the Middle East. It shows how Americans communicate, live and treat each other with respect."

-- A retired army officer: "Obama may keep talking about withdrawing U.S. troops, but if he does this very soon it will be a big mistake. The Iraqi forces are still immature and not qualified to protect the new Iraq. The Ba'athists are still hiding and active in the provinces, and if the Americans withdraw as soon as Obama has said it will be a disaster."

CROCKER